

# Letter from Taizé

BIMONTHLY 3.50 FF

April - May 1991 / 2

Property of  
Graduate Theological Union

## PRAGUE



### European meeting 1990/91

From 28 December 1990 to 2 January 1991, the city of Prague followed the rhythm of the prayers, the meetings and the travels of the 80,000 participants in the European meeting. Some 800 coaches and thirty special trains, from every country of Europe, arrived on the morning of 28 December.

Each participant, after going to a central welcome point, was quickly able to find his or her parish of welcome among the 200 places prepared in Prague and the surrounding region, including places up to sixty kilometres away.

The coaches whose arrival was especially significant were those who came from the greatest distance—three days of travel for the Portuguese, or for the Ukrainians, the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. Families opened their doors with great generosity. For several months beforehand, the welcome was prepared in parishes of different denominations, and they were always very hospitable. Often, because of contacts between neighbours, or newspaper and television appeals, families who had no connection with the church offered to welcome someone. With great simplicity, they offered the young pilgrims whatever they had. In a country where people had lived for the past forty years in a climate of fear and mistrust, this simple gesture of opening one's home was an important first step and witnessed to a deep desire for sharing and for reconciliation.

In early December, there were enough places to accommodate 45,000 people, but 35,000 more were still needed! So with great energy, the residents of Prague began to look everywhere with imagination, asking neighbours, school directors, fellow workers, town halls and clinics; in two weeks the 80,000 places needed were found.

Transportation had to be organized to towns and villages outside of Prague, with ten special trains and 300 coaches.

## 1991 in Taizé 41 intercontinental meetings of young adults

Each week from February to mid-November.

They will be marked by the presence of many young people from Eastern Europe

### Holy Week and Easter:

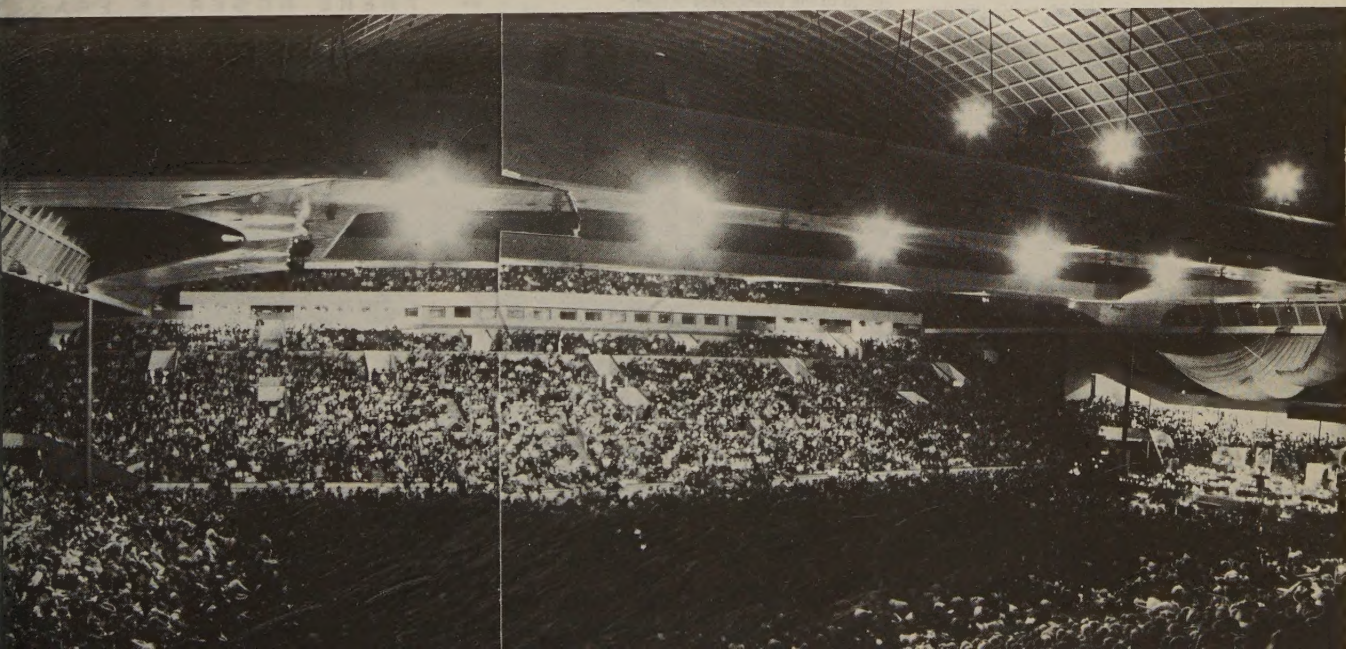
24 March - 7 April

For information and registration for the intercontinental meetings, write to: Meetings, F-71250 Taizé-Community, France. Tel. (in English) (33) 85.50.30.02

Many people were lodged in schools and gymnasiums. The directors showed trust and, thanks to the support of the city administration, almost all of the schools of Prague were able to be used, either for sleeping or for the morning prayers and meetings.

In most of the neighbourhoods, where the single church usually holds about fifty persons, the schools became temporary parishes. Young people from the city were often in charge of them. These young people were daring enough to speak about the meeting in their schools and university faculties and residences. In this way, for example, because of the support of the rector, who had been banned from the university and had to work for twenty years as a manual labourer, 10,000 young people were lodged in students' rooms, obtained by individual visits to each student! ▷

The common prayers took place simultaneously in several different places, including an indoor hockey stadium. ▼





# PRAGUE

Continued from page 1

And this great trust was present in families and in the city and government administrations as well as among Church leaders. Cardinal Tomasek, the archbishop of Prague, had immediately lent his support in February 1990, just a month after the changes in the country.

For many of the young people of Prague, it was a real challenge to find families who could welcome others and to prepare the morning prayers and meetings. Often, it was a good opportunity to get to know better one's parish and neighbourhood, to learn to count on one another, and to find strength in the prayer that accompanied the preparation. In some districts of Prague, where no churches had been built, the meeting was the first time Christians were able to undertake something together publicly.

The fact that the prayers and meetings were often held in a cultural centre or a school made it easier for many young people who had never had any contact with the church to take part. Many of them, raised in a climate of atheistic ideology, are ignorant of and mistrustful of Church structures and disoriented by the divisions between Christians. The large number and diversity of the participants from outside the country helped those from Prague to acquire a new outlook. One young man from Prague put it this way: "We would never have believed ourselves capable of this. We are so few and everything is so new for us. Such a gathering had never before been organized in our country. This helps us to live our faith in a different way, to open ourselves, not just remaining with those we know, «a few people, happy together», but to learn how to welcome those who come just as they are. We have become more open to the West, but we are going to welcome with joy young people from neighbouring countries, too. For all of us it will be a great step of trust."

## From the start, trust

Such a welcome was undoubtedly due to the contacts which had been built up for such a long time by visits and meetings, necessarily discreet, over the past thirty years. In addition, the pilgrimage of trust came as a response to great expectation in Czechoslovakia. The warm message of President Vaclav Havel said it well:

"...Our age of deep upheavals is leading us to a complete change of our lives, including in the spiritual realm. It is impelling us to seek the true meaning of life, without fear of the sacrifices which that entails. At this very moment, the «pilgrimage of trust on earth» comes to help us look for and find the sources of faith and new spiritual values, lost during decades of a totalitarian regime..." These upheavals concern daily life: the privatization of lodging and of the economy, across-the-board price increases on 1 January, worries on account of the international situation, especially in the Soviet Union.

A warm welcome in families. ■ "We have come here to go to the wellsprings of faith." ▼▼

There is also the difficulty of maintaining the values affirmed by the "velvet revolution": truth and love. One of the newspapers of Prague expressed it this way: "The seriousness of the participants was striking. They did not make the souvenir-sellers very rich. The entire meeting had a spiritual dimension that was very clear and marked by understanding and love, which we made it our priority to search for beginning on 17 November 1989."

Why did we set out in the middle of the winter to come to Prague from throughout Europe? We have come to go to the wellsprings of faith, to deepen an inner life with Jesus the Christ. If we could all remind ourselves that one of the most powerful human adventures is the continual blossoming of an inner life...

And why else have we come to Prague? We have come to prepare ourselves to take on responsibilities in order to take part in the building up of a Europe that is peaceful, free and reconciled.

In a letter written a century after the death of Christ, we find these words about the calling of Christians in society: "The calling that God entrusts to Christians is so beautiful that they are not permitted to flee it." Flee what? They are not permitted to flee their responsibilities.

FRÈRE ROGER IN PRAGUE







▲▲ At Letna, not far from the cathedral: heated tents for the prayer which held 40,000 young people, and Czechoslovakian soldiers distributing tea.

"Why have we set out in the middle of winter to come to Prague from throughout Europe? We have come to go to the wellsprings of faith, to deepen an inner life with Jesus the Christ."

With these words Brother Roger began his first meditation on Friday evening. The prayers were the heart of the meeting: mornings in parishes and often in gymnasiums specially arranged for the meeting, midday and evening in the centre of Prague.

So that everyone could follow translations in their own language, a telephone line linked the five places of prayer. In one of the tents, a translation was made into thirteen languages.

## The voice of a little child

Everything had to be made as simply as possible to allow so many people to pray together. A symbol of this was the voice of a little boy of eight years who sang alone "Lord, let us see your love", and the words were then repeated by everybody all together.

"For me, the common prayer was happiness at being able to sing together our love for Christ, for the first time, with young people from the whole of Europe.

It was also the intense times of silence. How can anyone believe that there were over 20,000 people in the same place and not a sound could be heard; all were listening to and waiting for Christ.

"I was also happy that every day prayer around the cross was offered. We remain very attentive to all the suffering around us," said Jan, from Prague.

Only 6,000 people could enter St Vitus Cathedral, the spiritual and historical centre of Prague. The place where most people gathered for prayer was at Letna, which was also the spot where the largest demonstration of the November 1989 revolution was held. In two weeks' time, two immense tents were set up, each one able to hold 20,000 persons.

For the tents to be set up, with sound and heat provided, help from several Czech and German companies was necessary.

The armies of the two countries also contributed to the heating and the floor coverings.

Many people were surprised at the presence of Czech soldiers; they were there not to provide security, but to prepare and distribute hot tea from forty outdoor kitchens.

The tea and the hot meals, twice a day, were well appreciated in the cold, rainy weather this year. Afternoons, Bible introductions on the themes of the "Letter from Prague" enabled people to continue the reflection begun in the morning in the parishes. ▷



Europe is undergoing a period of upheavals but also of reconstruction. God did not create us to be passive. When the human family is shaken, Christ gives us a communion in him from which we can draw creative and inventive energies.

If the young people from across Europe together in Prague would do all they could to become creators of reconciliation, they would open incalculable perspectives for the future of the European family. Europe has such need of a reconciliation that touches its very depths.

What is so new in the Gospel is the certainty of forgiveness and reconciliation. That is one of the turning-points the Gospel has brought to human history. When you return home, many of you will find complex situations. Some will take risks to remain together even in the divisions tearing apart the human family. Others will manage to reconcile wounded situations in their locality. If all could enter into this inner attitude: refusing to be the enemy of anyone at all.

Seeking reconciliation and trust involves an inner struggle. It is not an easy way out. It is not a naive trust that would shut its eyes to abuses of trust. When we realize that the Gospel calls us to be creators of reconciliation, we hesitate. Why be afraid? Christ is the one who is sending us. The important thing is to go forward with great selflessness, with a simple trust in Christ and his Gospel.

FRÈRE ROGER IN PRAGUE





# PRAGUE

Continued from page 3

▲▲ With Cardinal Tomasek. ■ "We are used to the presence of many strangers in the city, but this is the first time they are not tourists."

The inhabitants of Prague, even those who did not welcome anyone into their homes, could not fail to notice the presence of visitors who increased the population of the city by some 10% and at certain hours flooded the underground. They were aware of the spiritual dimension of the meeting.

One of them observed this scene the evening of the departure: "In the large entrance hall of the main railway station of Prague, a great crowd. Sitting on the floor, a group of young people surrounded by their bags and backpacks. A short distance away, standing, a very old Czech woman, wearing an apron and a scarf.

"Her infinitely kind face, with a faint smile on her lips, looked at each of the young people with a kind of caress. When asked, she said, «What a joy to see youngsters who are not drinking...» When she decided to leave, she said goodbye, and with her heavy hand she traced a cross in the air as a blessing, and then disappeared."

"We have come to prepare ourselves to take on responsibilities in order to take part in the building up of a Europe that is peaceful, free and reconciled," continued Brother Roger in his meditation the first day. This theme returned several times, linked to one of the first phrases of the Letter from Prague: "Leave discouragement behind."

As in all the European meetings, the personal stories shared made the reflection very concrete. Many of those who have accepted responsibilities in political or social life came to speak to groups. In addition, each family and each individual was able to explain in what way they were not running from the responsibility that comes with Christ's call.

## A year of reconciliation

Brother Roger's proposition to live a year of reconciliation from Easter 1991 to Easter 1992 will be a way of supporting one another across the world to live out simple and concrete gestures. The parishes of Prague and its surroundings understood that the European meeting could be a starting-point to get to know one another better in the neighbourhoods and to try to be more attentive to those who do not come to church.

The experience of a prayer that is simple but deep, that young people can lead with little preparation, was also important as a way of continuing. Very quickly, many parishes decided to have a prayer each week, sometimes including a sharing on the Letter from Prague, to which all the generations were invited, especially the families that had welcomed people during the meeting.

QThe continuity will be important for some parishes of different denominations, for which the meeting was the first opportunity in many years to get to know one another and to work together. Many are anxious to deepen these relationships. In the same way, contacts will continue between university students and a nearby parish made up mainly of elderly persons.

## new way of looking

Someone from Prague pointed out this immediate consequence for them: "We are used to having many strangers in the city, but this is the first time that they were not tourists, that another type of relationship was possible. We have abandoned our prejudices concerning neighbouring countries, with which we are so unfamiliar.

"To tell the truth, we are afraid of an influx of refugees from the Soviet Union in particular. But because of these days spent together, our way of looking has changed, and we are searching for ways of helping people who are in situations that we were familiar with, for example in the Baltic countries."



These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

# Meditating on the word

## May

## Johannine Hours

Romans 8.18-27

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow.

Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

**Wed** Ac 13.26-31 • **Jn 14.15-21**

Jesus said to his disciples: In a short time the world will no longer see me, but you will see that I live and you will also live.

**Thu** Ac 13.32-43 • **Jn 14.22-31**

Jesus said: The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

**Fri** Jn 1.43-45 • **Ph 3.12-14**

Paul writes: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

**Sat** Jn 20.11-18 • **Ac 15.7-12**

Peter said: God, who knows human hearts, showed that he accepts all people by giving the Holy Spirit to all.

**SUN** Ac 10.25-48 • **Jn 15.9-17**

Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because everything I have learnt from my Father I have made known to you.

**Mon** Jn 15.26-16.4 • **Col 4.2-6**

Persevere in prayer, being watchful and thankful.

**Tue** Jn 16.5-7 • **Jm 5.13-16**

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

**Wed** Ep 6.18-20 • **Jn 16.12-15**

Jesus said: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speak of his own accord but will say only what he has been told.

**Thu** Mk 16.15-20 • **Ac 1.1-11**

ASCENSION Jesus, risen from the dead, said to his disciples: You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

**Fri** Jn 16.20-23 • **Ep 1.17-23**

May God enlighten the eyes of your heart so that you may see the hope to which he calls you.

**11 Sat** Lk 24.36-43 • **Ep 2.1-6**

God is rich in merciful love. Because of the great love he has for us, he has brought us to life with Christ.

**12 SUN** Ac 1.15-26 • **Jn 17.11-19**

Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

**13 Mon** Jn 16.29-33 • **1 P 2.4-6**

Come to Christ, the living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in God's sight.

**14 Tue** Jn 17.1-11 • **1 P 2.9-10**

Peter writes: Once you were not a people at all, and now you are the people of God.

**15 Wed** Jn 17.20-26 • **1 P 2.19-25**

When Christ was insulted, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats but placed his trust in the One who judges justly.

**16 Thu** 1 P 3.18-22 • **Jn 21.15-19**

Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

**17 Fri** Jn 21.20-25 • **Ac 20.22-25**

Paul said: I do not place any value on my own life, provided that I complete the mission the Lord Jesus gave me — to bear witness to the good news of God's grace.

**18 Sat** Lk 24.44-49 • **Jl 3.1-5**

The Lord says: I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity.

**19 SUN** Ac 2.1-11 • **Gal 5.16-25** • **Jn 20.19-23**

PENTECOST The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

**20 Mon** Nb 11.24-29 • **Jn 14.15-17**

Jesus said to his disciples: I shall ask the Father and he will give you another protector to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth.

**21 Tue** Jn 15.26-27 • **Is 44.1-3**

The Lord says: Be not afraid, my servant, you whom I have chosen. For I shall pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I shall pour out my Spirit upon you.

**22 Wed** Is 59.21 • **Mk 9.14-29**

A man said to Jesus: I believe! Help my lack of faith.

**23 Thu** Jr 31.31-34 • **Mk 9.33-37**

Jesus said: Whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

**24 Fri** Ezk 37.11-14 • **Mk 9.38-41**

Jesus said: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, they will certainly not lose their reward.

**25 Sat** Ws 1.7 • **Jn 7.37-39**

Jesus cried out: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink!

**26 SUN** Dt 4.32-34, 39-40 • **Mt 28.16-20**

Jesus, risen from the dead, said to his disciples: I am with you always, to the end of time.

**27 Mon** Mk 10.13-16 • **1 P 3.13-17**

If you suffer for what is right then you are blessed! Do not be frightened. Simply proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts.

**28 Tue** 1 P 4.1-2, 6 • **Mk 10.17-22**

Jesus said to a rich man: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

**29 Wed** Mk 10.23-27 • **1 P 4.7-11**

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over many a sin.

**30 Thu** Ws 16.20-21, 26 • **Lk 9.11-17**

Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus said the blessing over them; then he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute among the people. They all ate as much as they wanted.

**31 Fri** 1 P 4.12-14 • **Mk 10.41-45**

Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world rulers lord it over their subjects and make their power felt. This is not to happen among you. No, anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

In the passage immediately preceding, St. Paul has affirmed that, from now on, we are children of God exactly as Christ is Son of God. We are "joint heirs with Christ" (v. 17) — everything which belongs to Christ belongs also to us. How then, in our lives, do we still experience so many trials?

St. Paul passes without any transition from the trials of Christians to the suffering of "creation" (in the language of the milieu from which St. Paul comes, this expression generally means all humanity, but here it most likely designates the whole universe — everything created by God). In their waiting, believers stand alongside the whole human family and all creation. God has imagined one and the same goal for everything that exists: "the glorious freedom of the children of God", in other words a kind of existence which, in union with the Risen Lord, has been set free from slavery to fear and resembles God's own existence.

All creation "is groaning" (v. 22) in labour pains, and Christians too "are groaning, waiting with eagerness for our bodies to be set free" (v. 23) — the transfiguration and conforming of our poor bodies to the body of the Risen Christ, as St. Paul writes in Philippians 3.21. But the most astonishing thing is that the Holy Spirit too joins in this "groaning" (v. 26). Waiting, even waiting in pain, is no longer something that happens outside God. It is God's Spirit who supports us in our waiting and even stimulates this expectant waiting within. And by the Spirit who intercedes, the groaning of creation and, still more, the groaning of believers is secretly transformed in prayer.

● Where around me do I perceive a hope or a waiting, be it ever so hidden, for a communion with the Risen Christ? What can arouse within us a hope for the whole human family? How can the mysterious and ceaseless prayer of the Holy Spirit within us set us free from anxiety?



These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

## Meditating on the word

## Johannine Hours

Luke 19.1-10

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow.

Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

### 1 Sat Mk 10.46-52 • 1 P 5.6-11

Resist the tempter, standing firm in the faith, because you know that it is the same kind of suffering that the community of believers throughout the world is undergoing.

### 2 SUN Heb 9.11-15 • Mk 14.12-16,22-26

During the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, saying: Take this; this is my body.

### 3 Mon Gn 1.1-2,4 • Mk 12.1-12

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone: this is the Lord's doing.

### 4 Tue Mk 12.13-17 • Gn 12.1-4

The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land I will show you." And Abraham set out, as the Lord had told him.

### 5 Wed Mk 12.26-27 • Gn 28.12-17

The Lord says: I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go. I will not abandon you before accomplishing what I have promised you.

### 6 Thu Gn 32.23-31 • Mk 12.28-34

Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two greatest commandments.

### 7 Fri Ex 3.1-6 • Mk 12.41-44

Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury and, calling his disciples, he said, "In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others, for they all gave out of their wealth, but she has put in everything she possessed."

### 8 Sat Ex 3.13-15 • Mk 13.28-32

Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

### 9 SUN 2 Co 4.13-5.1 • Mk 3.20-35

Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.

### 10 Mon Mt 5.1-12 • Ex 13.17-22

In the desert, the Lord went ahead of his people, by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a column of fire to give them light. Thus they could walk by day and by night.

### 11 Tue Ex 33.12-17 • Mt 5.14-16

Jesus said: Let your light shine in people's sight, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

### 12 Wed Ex 34.29-33 • Mt 5.20,23-24

Jesus said: If you are bringing you offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

### 13 Thu Lv 19.1-2,15-18 • Mt 5.33-42

Jesus said: Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

### 14 Fri Mt 5.43-48 • Lv 19.33-34

God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

### 15 Sat Mt 6.1-4 • Lv 26.11-13

God says to his people: I shall fix my home among you and never reject you. I shall be your God and you will be my people.

### 16 SUN Ezk 17.22-24 • Mk 4.26-34

Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like this: A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, whether he is awake or asleep, the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how.

### 17 Mon Mt 6.5-6 • Dt 4.29-31

The Lord your God is a merciful God who will not forsake you.

### 18 Tue Dt 6.4-9 • Mt 6.7-15

Jesus said: If you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours.

### 19 Wed Dt 7.7-9 • Mt 6.16-21

Jesus said: When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who is there in secret.

### 20 Thu Dt 15.7-8,10-11 • Mt 6.25-34

Jesus said: Do not be anxious about your life... Your Father in heaven knows what you need. Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day's own trouble is sufficient for the day.

### 21 Fri Dt 30.11-14 • Mt 7.1-5

Jesus said: Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

### 22 Sat Mt 7.7-11 • Dt 30.19-20

Choose life: loving the Lord your God, listening to his voice, holding fast to him — for in this your life consists.

### 23 SUN Jb 38.1,8-11; 40.3-5 • Mk 4.35-41

When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

### 24 Mon Ac 13.22-26 • Lk 1.57-66,80

St JOHN THE BAPTIST Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, prophesied: You, little child, will be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him.

### 25 Tue Mt 7.24-29 • Col 1.9-14

God has rescued us from the rule of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

### 26 Wed Mt 8.14-17 • Col 1.15-20

Christ is the head of the Body, the Church. He is the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead, for God wanted all his fullness to dwell in him.

### 27 Thu Mt 8.18-22 • Col 1.21-23

Paul writes: Persevere, standing firm on the on the solid base of faith, without drifting away from the hope held out by the Gospel.

### 28 Fri Mt 9.1-8 • Col 1.24-29

God has wanted to reveal to the nations the splendid riches of the mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

### 29 Sat Ac 12.1-11 • Mt 16.13-19

SS PETER AND PAUL Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

### 30 SUN Mk 5.21-43 • Ws 1.13-15; 2.23-24

God did not make death, he takes no pleasure in the destruction of the living. He created all things for life.

As a chief tax-collector, Zacchaeus was certainly not loved. Tax-collectors were despised because of their collaboration with the occupying power and still more because they generally demanded sums greater than those fixed by the official tariffs — which few people would be able to check — and pocketed the surplus. It was said that conversion was ruled out for them, for to achieve it they would need to make amends for their wrongdoing and that was impossible — for no human memory, including their own, was capable of counting up the frauds they had committed.

But Christ loved Zacchaeus, this little man perched on his tree. Before going to his home, Jesus consciously abandons his good reputation and any chances of being listened to in Jericho. Jesus gives all in order to love Zacchaeus, he loves him as if he were an only son, he prefers Zacchaeus' house to any other in the city.

Zacchaeus has no time to put things in order or to prepare his house. He understands that in Christ's eyes he counts so much that he is no longer the unloved one but the favourite. Immediately, he responds with joy. And in his celebration with Christ everything in his life changes.

● What did Zacchaeus find in Jesus' attitude to him that made him accept the invitation so quickly and so joyfully? What touches me the most in Zacchaeus' attitude and actions? What can tear away the veil of sadness which has been woven by the hard events of our life and which hides life's beauty?



# Truth and justice are impossible without forgiveness

Maria Kaplan is a mother of ten children, a member of the Czech and Slovak Federal Parliament. She came to speak to one of the groups during the regional meetings on 1 January. Here is part of what she had to say:

Our family has known Taizé for a long time, but in the beginning, over fifteen years ago, we were not able to have official contacts. Brothers and young people sent from Taizé visited and supported us, for example when my husband was sent to prison. Then we began a Saturday evening prayer in our home, which has lasted over ten years.

Despite police surveillance, we never had to interrupt that prayer. People from throughout the country used to come to it, young and old, often even young people who were not baptized but who were searching for faith. That prayer was for some a starting-point to take on responsibilities, to help prisoners or victims of injustice.

Gradually we realized that the future of our nation was within ourselves. Unless we began, nothing would change. For example some young people dared, in spite of arrests, to propose a regular time and place for "open dialogue". The government was afraid of that, that people would speak openly about the problems of our country. All that prepared our "velvet" revolution.

The young were prepared; they were already protesting by their lives against falsehood and for truth. And thanks to their inner strength, they were able to remain calm during the demonstrations, standing in front of the police with their hands open, holding candles.

A year later, we are still at the beginning. We must rediscover and propose to the younger generation moral and Christian values. We have prayed much together, and now I am asking you to continue to pray for our nation.

The enthusiasm and happiness we experienced during the days of revolution and later on, during the large demonstrations when the entire nation felt united, was a thirst for freedom, in truth and justice. We did not want to use violence.

Now we see how difficult it is to change old structures, because lies are a powerful cement. There is also a solidarity in evil! Today, our president, Vaclav Havel, reminded us that it will not be easy, that we are beginning a year of trials that will require us to remain faithful to our ideals, to be ready for the sacrifices necessary to reform the economic system.

Christians have an important witness to give. The way of Christ is never a way of victory, but rather a way of service, work and sacrifice. We see more and more people interested in the Christian faith, but we know well that the nation is not Christian, that forty years of totalitarianism have diminished greatly the life of the Church.

We have to forgive a lot, and it's hard, but we have to trust even when we know that the people do not deserve our trust. And that's when it's necessary to find the way of God. On the one hand we want truth, to shed light, that all the roads of evil be lit up, and we want justice. But on the other hand, we see that without forgiveness it's not possible.» □

## A year of reconciliation

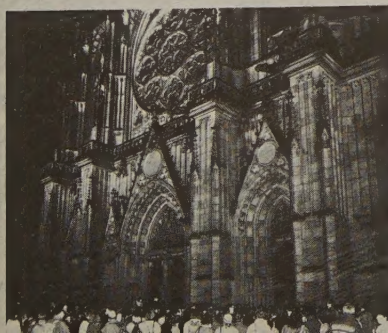
For Christians, there is a hierarchy of priorities. Today, one of the priorities is everything that leads to reconciliation. So we are going to give ourselves a year, from Easter 1991 to Easter 1992, to enter into the call to reconciliations.

Easter will be 31 March. Until then, how can we prepare ourselves?

If, on your return home, you were to arrange churches... Churches can be made welcoming with very little, notably with very little money: a few candles, icons, some cloth and paint, an old carpet. Another room, such as a sacristy, can also be fixed up as a place to meet and to share a little food. In the churches, there are so many elderly persons who experience loneliness. Will you be among those who do not abandon them to their solitude? It would be wonderful if a common prayer brought together all the generations, with no segregation by age, from little children to the very old.

FRÈRE ROGER IN PRAGUE

"The future of our nations is within ourselves." Young people during the meeting in Prague. ▼▼







## Listening to the CONTINENTS

**L**ord Christ, at times we are strangers on this earth, disturbed by the violence, the harsh oppositions. (...) Like a gentle breeze, you breathe upon us the Spirit of peace. Transfigure the deserts of our doubts to prepare us to be bearers of reconciliation wherever you place us, until a hope of peace arises in our world.

### PRAYER BY BROTHER ROGER

An explicit petition for people in zones of conflict can be inserted in this prayer.

## Letter from Taizé

### Annual subscription (1991)

Ordinary subscription:

France 30 FF

Other countries 40 FF

Supporting subscription: 75 or 150 FF

Airmail subscription: (outside Europe only) 50 FF

### means of payment:

• by credit card (Visa, Mastercard, Eurocard, Carte Bleue): send to Taizé the number of your card, its dates of validity, and say what sum in *French Francs* you wish to transfer.

• by international Giro transfer, in *French Francs*, addressed to: Lettre de Taizé, CCP 20041-01007-0061446M038-71 or CCP LYON 614 46 M.

• by cheque in *French Francs* to "Lettre de Taizé, 71250 Taizé-Communauté" made payable through "Société Générale" (Eurocheques in *French Francs* accepted).

• In Germany, Australia, Austria, Canada, Finland, India, Ireland, Italy, Korea, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and USA it is possible to pay the subscription within the country. Write to Taizé to ask for the address in your country.

### Correspondence:

Letter from Taizé, 71250 Taizé-Communauté, France

## Manila

### Rooted in the parishes

As this issue of the Letter from Taizé is going to press, the meeting in Manila, in the Philippines, is beginning. Brother Roger is there with some of his brothers and the young people who have been preparing this meeting for the past several months. Here is some news from Manila on the preparation of that gathering:

Since the announcement of the pilgrimage of trust in Manila, more than a year ago, a group of young people in a parish of Mandaluyong decided to meet once a week to pray together. After some very humble beginnings, this prayer became a meeting-point for young people from throughout the city. In this way, while being rooted in their own parish, young people began to open their doors and their hearts to others and thus prepared themselves to welcome those who will come from other provinces and from other countries.

The neighbours have now become used to hearing the songs in different languages, because the chapel became too small and so its surroundings also had to be arranged for prayer.

Days of retreat allowed young people of different backgrounds to meet and to listen to one another. Following an introduction on the Beatitudes, in a small-group sharing, one of the participants explained how he saw his life in the light of the Beatitude "Happy the peacemakers: they will be called children of God." While still very young, he had been involved in drugs and violence. Slowly he realized that within him there was a profound search and that he was thirsting for something else. He joined young people from the parish, and quickly began to look with them for ways of making life better in the district.

In a country where over half of the population is younger than 20 years old, young people take the most active part in the life of parishes. If they were supported, they could change a lot of things in their surroundings.

The meeting will enable people to reflect on the same topic as in Prague, "Leave discouragement behind", and to hear from those who are bearers of trust. At this time, there are great tensions in the country. Even if the Persian Gulf is far away, most half a million Filipinos work there. The pilgrimage of trust thus takes on an even deeper meaning.

Another day, the theme was the multiplication of the loaves and the meal distributed to 5,000 people. We reflected on the questions: What are the five loaves and two fishes that Jesus is asking me to share with others? Who has God entrusted to me?

Prayers are being held in all the districts. Sometimes this is an opportunity for meeting together with all the generations, for example in a chapel of a parish in neighbourhood of squatters. A few days earlier, some families had been expelled and had found temporary shelter in the church. During the prayer around the cross, young people, children and elderly people entrusted them to God in their prayer.

In the rest of the country, a reflection has accompanied the preparation: What are the sufferings around us, and where are the signs of hope? Where does mistrust reign? Who are the witnesses to trust? Can I be one of them?

At Baguio, in the north of the country, our prayer was the first youth prayer held after the earthquake in July. During the long time of intercession, mingled with pain at the earthquake was wonder at the generosity and the capacity for self-giving of so many Christians.

